



Frustrated voters cut ties with Democrats, Republicans

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By **Richard Wolf**, USA TODAY



AP, AFP/Getty Images

Left Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo.; right, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz.

The nation's fastest-growing political party is "none of the above," which could be bad news for **Democrats** and Republicans.

As the 2010 midterm elections and the anti-tax "Tea Party" movement take shape, more Americans are registering "unaffiliated" rather than signing up with one of the two major parties.

The number of independent voters has grown faster in the past two years than Democrats and Republicans in at least 14 of the 28 states and the District of Columbia that register voters by party, according to a USA TODAY review.

"It's been a steady incline," says Ken Bennett, secretary of State in **Arizona**, where unaffiliated voters have jumped 30% since 2008. "It's kind of an in-your-face reminder to candidates of both parties

that there's a whole other block of people who have to be acknowledged and courted."

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The trend might bode well for moderates in states with open primaries, where the unaffiliated can vote. It could help **GOP** Sen. **John McCain** in **Arizona** and **Democratic** Sen. Michael Bennet in **Colorado**, being challenged by traditional party stalwarts, says Jennifer Duffy of the non-partisan *Cook Political Report*.

The rise of independents goes back two decades, but many states are seeing bigger boosts now. For the first time since Gallup starting asking in 1992, both major parties are viewed unfavorably by most Americans. Nearly four in 10 voters call themselves independents, Gallup says.

Unaffiliated voters now outnumber Democrats and Republicans in nine states: Alaska, Colorado, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey and Rhode Island.

Several states have seen dramatic shifts in the past two years, according to voter registration data:

- North Carolina has seen an 18% jump in unaffiliated voters, 8% among Democrats and no increase for Republicans. "People no longer want to be associated with a party," says elections director

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Gary Bartlett. "They like to not be categorized."

- In New Hampshire, independents are up 16%, Democrats 2%, and Republicans are flat. "The people who choose to be undeclared ... are interested in voting for the person, regardless of party affiliation," says Deputy Secretary of State Dave Scanlan.

- Nevada's unaffiliated and independent registrations are up 13%, Democrats 8%. The GOP lost 2%.

Even where the rise of independents has slowed, officials predict a rebound. Says Oregon Secretary of State [Kate Brown](#): "It's because of the frustration with the political situation in Washington."

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